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Casey says his agency is blameless

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CIA Director William J. Casey last night reiterated his assertions that the intelligence agency did no wrong in the Iranian arms deal, instead telling reporters at La Salle University, "We did exactly right."

Casey appeared weary as he climbed the steps at the College Union building to attend a dinner honoring Robert C. Ames, a Philadelphia native and 1956 La Salle graduate who was killed in the April 1983 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut.

Casey denied a Wall Street Journal report that he had known last spring that funds from the sale of U.S. arms to Iran were being diverted to Nicaraguan rebels.

"That's absolutely false. It doesn't square with the case," Casey said in response to reporters' questions.

Casey's aides told reporters that he would answer no more questions on the arms deal last night and ushered him into the banquet room. He was to speak after the dinner.

On Wednesday, Casey had spent five hours before a congressional committee investigating the controversial arms sale and testified that the CIA had no role in the fund transfer.

Earlier yesterday, a former director of the CIA, Richard Helms, said it was possible that Casey did not know about the diversion of those funds.

"Yes, I think it's possible, particularly if he didn't want to be informed about it," Helms said in response to a

question at a day-long symposium on the Mideast at La Salle. The symposium also was held in honor of Ames.

Saying American students were often "woefully lacking" in knowledge of other cultures, Helms extolled a letter on the cultural differences between Arabs and Americans that was written by Ames to intelligence officers beginning their careers with the CIA.

Ames was director of the CIA's Office of Analysis for the Near East and South Asia when he died in the Beirut bombing April 18, 1983, which killed a total of 49 people.

Urging students to learn about the world views of different cultures, Helms said, "It's a wide, wide world out there."

Helms' praise of the letter brought an angry response from Caryn

McTighe Mustil, an associate professor of English and one of 37 La Salle faculty members who signed a letter objecting to the symposium because of what they said were its ties to the CIA.

"I was appalled at the racism, the xenophobia, the arrogance toward Third World countries," Mustil said of the letter's contents.

Mustil said that the symposium presentations were tilted toward the CIA viewpoint and that no Arabs were among the speakers.

The symposium, which drew a star-studded cast of Mideast policy experts, was defended by Edward A. Turzanski, associate director of La Salle's alumni office, which co-sponsored the event with the political science department.



Casey (left) meets Nancy and Bart Hanlon. Ames, the CIA official honored by the La Salle symposium, was her brother.